

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 02208 051630Z
ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2547
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN
DIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR
SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2208

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, MILI, LE, IS, SY
SUBJECT: ESCALATION IN THE SOUTH?

REF: A. BEIRUT 1479, B. BEIRUT 1504

1. SUMMARY:

CURRENT SYRIAN INTENTIONS AND MILITARY ACTIONS IN
SOUTH LEBANON ARE UNCLEAR. NONETHELESS, OPEN COLLABORATION
BETWEEN LEBANESE CHRISTIAN FORCES AND ISRAELIS UNQUESTIONABLY
IS AN EMBARRASSMENT TO DAMASCUS. END SUMMARY

2. WE ARE UNABLE ASSERT WITH CONFIDENCE CURRENT SYRIAN
INTENTIONS IN SOUTH LEBANON. SYRIANS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN
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CLOSE MOUTHED ABOUT THEIR TACTICAL MILITARY ACTIONS IN
THE LEBANESE CAMPAIGN. WE NOTED ISRAELI RADIO HAS ANNOUNCED
THAT SYRIAN ARTILLERY YESTERDAY SUPPORTED PALESTINIANS
AND LEFTISTS IN ATTACK ON CHRISTIAN FORCES IN MARJAYOUN
AREA. BASIS FOR THIS ISRAELI AFFIRMATION HAS NOT YET BEEN
MADE CLEAR.

3. WE BELIEVE COMMENT IN PARA 5 REFTEL A THAT HIGH-LEVEL SYRIAN MILITARY VISITS HAVE PRECEDED SYRIAN MILITARY MOVES IN THE SAME GENERAL AREAS OF LEBANON OVERSTATES CASE. BOTH DEFMIN TLAS AND DEPDEFMIN NAJI JAMIL HAVE PAID VISITS TO ADF FORCES IN LEBANON DURING PAST MONTHS WITH NO APPARENT MILITARY MOVES BEING MADE IN DIRECT CONSEQUENCE. THESE VISITS HAVE BEEN PRESUMABLY DESIGNED TO BOLSTER MORALE OF SYRIAN TROOPS.

4. THERE IS, NONETHELESS, EVIDENCE OF SYRIAN UNHAPPINESS WITH RECENT CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR IN SOUTH LEBANON. SYRIAN PRESS COMMENTARIES HAVE REFERRED CRITICALLY TO ACTIONS OF CHRISTIAN FIGHTERS IN SOUTH WITHOUT SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFYING THEM AS CHRISTIANS. MAHMUD KAMIL IN APRIL 4 AL-BAATH LEAD EDITORIAL SAID: "THE PROBLEM IS THAT ISRAEL WANTS TO SMASH RESISTANCE IN SOUTH LEBANON AND TO EMPTY THE SOUTH OF ITS INHABITANTS IN ORDER TO FORM WHAT CAN BE CALLED THE SECURITY BELT IMPOSED BY THREATENING USE OF FORCES OR BY HELPING CERTAIN FORCES TO UNDERTAKE THIS ROLE, WHETHER THESE FORCES BELIEVE THEY ARE ACTING FOR ISRAEL OR PLAYING THEIR POLITICAL GAME OR NOT. IN EITHER CASE THEY WOULD NOT BE EXAMPT FROM THE ACCUSATION OF ACTING AGAINST LEBANON'S INTEREST AND AGAINST ARAB INTEREST." IN SIMILAR VEIN, MAJID MUAWWAD WROTE APRIL 1, IN AL-BAATH THAT "ANY ACTION OR ATTEMPT TO OBSTRUCT THE PROGRESS OF PEACE AND HINDER THE GOVERNMENT FROM CARRYING THRU ITS MISSION IS AN ACTION THAT NEITHER SERVES LEBANON NOR THE ARAB CAUSE, AND FROM WHICH ONLY THE ENEMIES OF LEBANON AND ARABISM WILL BENEFIT." CONFIDENTIAL

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5. ARAFAT YESTERDAY AFFIRMED TO YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR THAT HIS LATEST MEETING WITH ASAD REPRESENTED A FULL NORMALIZATION OF SYRIAN-PLO RELATIONS (DAMASCUS 2203). ARAFAT'S REPORTED VISIT IN COMPNAY WITH MUHSIN AND NAJI JAMIL TO NABATIYEH APRIL 2 MIGHT BE READ AS A CONCRETE EXPRESSION OF SUCH NORMALIZATION. WOULD NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT NAJI JAMIL'S BROTHER, FLO DIRECTOR TALA'T JAMIL, DENIED FLATLY TO DATT THODAY THAT NAJI HAD VISITED LEBANON RECENTLY AND SPECIFICALLY NOT RPT NOT ON APRIL 2 HOWEVER, THERE IS NO NECESSARY CONNECTION BETWEEN CLAIM OF NORMALIZATION AND REPORTED SYRIAN SUPPORT OF AN ATTACK ON CHRISTIANS IN MARJAYOUN.

INCIDENTIALLY, WE BELIEVE IRANIAN REPORT THAT YARMOUK BRIGADE IN NABATIYAH REPRESENTS NOTHER NEW (REFTEL B) THIS FATAH FORCE HAS BEEN IN LEBANON FOR OVER A YEAR AND "FATAH UNITS" HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN NABATIYAH SINCE ADF WITHDRAWAL IN FEBRARY.

5. THE OPEN COLLABORATION BETWEEN CHAMOUNISTS AND ISRAELIS
UNQUESTINABLY CONTINUES TO BE AN EMBARRASSMENT AND
IRRITATION TO DAMASCUS. HOWEVER, REPORTED SYRIAN ARTILLERY SUPPORT
FOR ATTACK AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN MARJAYOUN IS LIKELY AT
MOST TO HAVE BEEN A WARNING TO CHRISTIANS NOT TO PRESS
THEIR CAMPAIGN TOO FAR. ASAD REMAINS CAUTIOUS IN
HANDLING SYRIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON. WE DOUBT HE HAS
DECIDED ON A MAJOR POLICY SHIFT, THROWING THE WEIGHT OF SYRIAN
FORCES AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN THE SOUTH.
MURPHY

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Message Attributes

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